

Seize the Day Initiative Weekly Update **July 7, 2009**

The following are recent updates from OSPC and OSI on operational activities related to the Seize the Day initiative.

OPEN SOCIETY POLICY CENTER Updates

Advancing the Hardest Issues: National Security and Human Rights

As reported in the June 24 Seize the Day Initiative Weekly Update and the July 2 memo of Ann Beeson and Steve Rickard to George Soros and Aryeh Neier, the Republicans have been highly effective in using fear tactics to frustrate President Obama's efforts to close Guantanamo by January 2010 and reform U.S. policy on detention of terrorism suspects. In June, dozens of Democrats in Congress – frightened by the specter of appearing soft on terrorism, and lacking the cover of strong White House leadership – joined Republicans in passing an amendment to a wartime spending bill that restricts the Obama administration's ability to bring Guantanamo detainees to the U.S. This month, the Senate Armed Services Committee stands poised to vote on a bill that will revamp military commissions to the satisfaction of the Obama administration but still fails to provide defendants with fundamental procedural protections. Even more troubling are President Obama's endorsement in his May national security speech of indefinite detention without charge or trial, and reports that as many as 100 of the detainees remaining at Guantanamo may be candidates for indefinite detention.

Later this week, OSI and OSPC hope to recommend a set of four rapid response grants to Human Rights First and the Center for International Policy totaling \$1 million to support two complementary and closely coordinated campaigns to confront head on conservative fear-mongering and to regain the momentum for closing Guantanamo and implementing a national security policy that respects human rights. (Of this \$1 million, \$500,000 would consist of (c)(3) funds from OSI*, and the remaining \$500,000 would consist of (c)(4) funds from OSPC. Each organization would receive a total of \$500,000 in combined (c)(3) and (c)(4) funds. Efforts to raise additional funding are underway.)

Human Rights First (HRF) proposes to lead a campaign of persuasion that will identify, and send on speaking engagements, a set of bipartisan "validators" – prosecutors, law enforcement and prison officials, state and local elected leaders, homeland security experts, and interrogators, in addition to the retired military officers that HRF has been cultivating for the past few years – who can make the case that closing Guantanamo in a rights-respecting manner will promote national security. To date, HRF has targeted Virginia, where the opposition has launched a "grassroots" Citizens for a Safe Alexandria campaign, and New York City, where the first Guantanamo detainee to be criminally charged by the Obama administration has been transferred.

The **Center for International Policy** (CIP), under the leadership of former U.S. Representative Tom Andrews of Maine, proposes to lead a campaign that will mobilize the broader progressive community to support these same goals. The CIP campaign

would focus on messaging, the viral promotion of video ads attacking conservative fear-mongering, and the targeting of key jurisdictions for grassroots engagement and tours of high profile speakers. The campaign would not be in any sense partisan, but it would focus on the ways in which the “fear card” is being used to stampede elected officials into voting the wrong way on national security issues. The CIP campaign would work to provide assurance to politicians of both parties that casting tough votes on these issues will be appreciated by a significant and vocal segment of the voting public and “validated” as sound national security policy by military, intelligence, and law enforcement experts.

Both HRF and CIP recognize that we have only a narrow window of opportunity to block the abusive policies of the Bush administration from becoming the “new normal” and to restore human rights in national security policy and achieve accountability. Just as importantly, both organizations are prepared to lead campaigns that are scaled to win this battle. (Nancy Chang, Campaign Manager, National Security and Human Rights Campaign; Stephen Rickard Director, OSPC)

Advancing the Hardest Issues: Comprehensive Immigration Reform

The long-awaited meeting between President Obama and a bipartisan group of about 30 congressional leaders to kick off the push for comprehensive immigration reform took place on Thursday, June 25. It was generally perceived as a success, with the focus being on the non-inflammatory nature of the discussions. The President’s latest timetable, discussed at the meeting, calls for work this summer leading to congressional debate on a comprehensive plan beginning later this year or early 2010. Republicans indicated that the bill must include strong guest worker provisions. This is being championed by John McCain, who says he’s willing to take his “political lumps” by opposing the labor unions on the guest worker issue. At the same time, Chuck Schumer stepped up his efforts for immigration reform this week by unveiling several “principles” for a workable system, which include tough talk on “illegal” immigration and stepped up border enforcement, as well as provisions for family reunification and conversion of the “flow of unskilled illegal immigrants” into “a more manageable and controlled flow of legal immigrants.” (Maria Teresa Rojas, Senior Program Manager, Equality and Opportunity Fund)

Advancing the Hardest Issues: Criminal Justice Reform

The bipartisan Youth PROMISE Act – proposed federal legislation that would increase spending on violence prevention and look at ways to reduce the number of incarcerated youth in the U.S. – continues to pick up momentum with a hearing scheduled in U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott’s (D-VA) crime subcommittee on July 15. With lead sponsors including Reps. Scott and Michael Castle (R-DE) and Senators Robert Casey (D-PA) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME), its passage is a key priority of OSI-DC* as well as OSPC. A number of Criminal Justice Fund grantees are working on the issue as part of the Justice Roundtable chaired by OSI-DC, among them the **Justice Policy Initiative** and **Campaign for Youth Justice**. Democracy and Power Fund grantee the **League of Young Voters** has made this a top national organizing issue, securing several city council endorsements across the U.S. and writing about the bill in a June 18 *Huffington Post* article. The legislation has significant bi-partisan sponsorship, with 204 co-sponsors,

including 16 Republicans and ninety lawmakers have backed the bill since June 1. The Youth PROMISE Act is also supported by over 200 national and state juvenile justice, education, and religious organizations and has been endorsed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the cities of Los Angeles, Newport News, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Richmond, and Santa Fe, among others. (Lenny Noisette, Program Director, Criminal Justice Fund; Bill Vandenberg, Program Director, Democracy and Power Fund)

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE Updates

Advancing the Hardest Issues: Criminal Justice Reform/ Innovations in Advocacy

On June 26, nearly two years after trumped up charges against six young African-American males case drew national attention to Jena, Louisiana for what advocates called “Jim Crow justice,” the five remaining Jena 6 cases were brought to conclusion with the accused pleading “no contest” to misdemeanor simple battery charges. The five young men will spend no time in jail, serve seven days of probation, and pay relatively minor fines and court fees. This is a dramatic outcome considering that the initial charges against the young men were attempted murder. A broad coalitional effort included many community and online activists, including **ColorOfChange** (COC), a recent Seize the Day Initiative grantee and a national leader in online organizing in the African-American community. COC played a key role in the Jena 6 resolution, demonstrating the potential for online advocacy impacts on criminal justice issues. ColorOfChange generated over 300,000 letters to former Louisiana Governor Blanco and the Jena District Attorney and organized more than 10,000 activists to go to Jena for a large rally in the fall of 2007. Members who could not make it to Jena held 150 rallies and vigils across the U.S., made 6,000 calls to Louisiana elected officials, and sent 4,000 complaints demanding an inquiry into the DA’s actions. COC members also contributed \$275,000 online, providing the bulk of the funds for the legal team that helped to achieve the June 26 outcome. The coordinating attorney said that “none of this would have happened” without the work of ColorOfChange and its members. (Bill Vandenberg, Democracy and Power Fund)

* OSI and Seize the Day Initiative funded organizations are explicitly prohibited from using OSI funding for lobbying on legislation.

This week’s update was compiled by Bill Vandenberg and reviewed by Ann Beeson and Kay Murray.